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ACTION EAP-00

INFO LOG-00 AID-00 EB-00 UTED-00 TEDE-00 IO-00 OES-00
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FM AMEMBASSY HANOI
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7979
INFO AMCONSUL HO CHI MINH CITY
AMEMBASSY BANGKOK
USMISSION GENEVA
AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU
ASEAN REGIONAL FORUM COLLECTIVE
USDA WASHDC
DEPT OF ENERGY WASHDC
DEPT OF COMMERCE WASHDC

UNCLAS HANOI 001378

SIPDIS

STATE FOR EAP/BCLTV
USDOC FOR 4430/MAC/ASIA/OPB/VLC/HPPHO
STATE FOR USAID/DCHA/OFDA KISAACS, GGOTTLIEB
STATE FOR USAID/DCHA/OFDA MMARX, RTHAYER, BDEEMER
STATE FOR USAID/DCHA/OFDA DAA WILLIAM GARVELINK
BANGKOK FOR OFDA SENIOR REGIONAL ADVISOR TOM DOLAN
KATHMANDU FOR OFDA REGIONAL ADVISOR WILLIAM BERGER
GENEVA FOR USAID NANCY KYLOH
USDA FOR FAS

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [SENV](#) [KSCA](#) [TBIO](#) [VM](#)
SUBJECT: VIETNAM - DROUGHT DISASTER DECLARATION

THIS IS AN ACTION CABLE

REF: HANOI 857

1. Summary. In response to what is being characterized by GVN officials as the worst drought to afflict Vietnam in 30 years, Ambassador Marine declares a disaster and requests USD 200,000 in OFDA assistance. Emergency activities to be supported by this assistance would focus on improved access to drinking water through drought proofing and water harvesting initiatives (see paragraphs 18-20 for recommendations). End summary.

ACTION REQUEST/DISASTER DECLARATION

2. Following the assessment mission of USAID personnel to the South Central Coastal region of Vietnam, I am declaring a drought disaster in Vietnam under my authority as Chief of Mission. The assessment mission has confirmed that a drought disaster exists and that Government of Vietnam (GVN) authorities welcome USG assistance. Further, I confirm that it is in the interest of the United States to provide drought assistance to Vietnam. In consultation with OFDA's Acting Senior Regional Advisor for Asia, Embassy requests USD 50,000 under the Ambassador's authority, plus an additional sum of USD 150,000 to support drought-proofing initiatives in the South Central Coastal region of Vietnam. Post will communicate with OFDA on transfer of funds once the partner selection process is completed. Embassy requests that OFDA make an additional assessment of the Central Highlands area once clearance from GVN for the Mission is obtained. Pending the findings of that assessment and progress of this year's rainy season, Post may request additional assistance.

BACKGROUND

3. As outlined in previous cable (Hanoi 857) on the drought in Vietnam, GVN reports an estimated 1.12 million people are facing daily water shortages, 500,000 are suffering from hunger, and that Vietnam has suffered economic losses of over USD 113 million due to a severe drought that has continued for up to three years in the South Central Coastal and Central Highland regions of Vietnam (nine provinces total). Provincial officials refer to this as the worst drought in 30 years.

4. In response, Embassy requested the USAID Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA) Regional Advisor, accompanied by USAID/Vietnam staff, to conduct a rapid assessment of the drought situation in Binh Thuan and Ninh Thuan provinces, areas that GVN officials indicate are the worst affected and among the poorest provinces in Vietnam. Objectives of the mission included confirmation of the severity of the drought, the need for USG assistance, willingness of GVN local officials to accept USG assistance, and development of recommendations by the OFDA Advisor on an appropriate USG response to the drought. The assessment

team consisted of OFDA Regional Advisor, William S. Berger; Mission Disaster Response Officer, Nathan Sage; and USAID Development Assistance Specialist, Phung Thi Thanh Van. The team met with provincial, district, and commune-level officials and technical experts as well as staff from international NGOs. Onsite field interviews were conducted with affected populations in both provinces. In addition, the team met with UNICEF representative and debriefed U.S. Consul General Seth Winnick in Ho Chi Minh City.

SITUATION IN TWO SOUTH CENTRAL PROVINCES

15. Binh Thuan Province. As indicated by provincial-level officials, the current drought, which started in July 2004, has had heavy impact on agriculture, animal husbandry, hydrology, forestry, and all aspects of the lives of those living in the province. There are both short- and long-term consequences. In 2004, the drought affected 40,628 hectares or 51 percent of the available cropland. Rice yields were down by 47 percent, maize was down by 78 percent and cotton down 78 percent for a total loss of VND 118.6 billion (USD 7.5 million). In 2005, the drought situation is even worse, with losses to the winter/spring crop totaling VND 146 billion (USD 9.2 million). The forestry loss is 4,977 hectares valued at VND 23 billion (USD 1.5 million), mainly affecting newly planted forest areas and seedlings. Water availability from lakes, rivers and ground water sources is only 40 percent of normal capacity and many rivers lakes and streams have dried up. Saltwater intrusion is a problem in Phong, Ham Thuan Nam, and Ham Tan districts. A total of 118,769 people or 26,729 households in eight districts are suffering an acute shortage of water for drinking and sanitation. The most affected areas are: Phong Phu, Vinh Tan, Vinh Hoa, Phu Lac in Tuy Phong district, Bac Binh, and Ham Thuan Bac district. From January 2005 to present, GVN has provided VND 22 billion (USD 1.4 million) for water demand. A total of 16,787 households require food assistance from the province.

16. In response to the drought in Binh Thuan, GVN has provided 1,600 tons of rice and is preparing to provide food and other assistance over the next six months. Provincial authorities are using tanker trucks to supply drinking water, unsuccessfully attempting to drill deep wells for communities, dredging channels and stream beds, and investigating new ground water sources. They are also providing support for feeding cattle, and preparing reforestation programs. GVN has plans to provide seeds to farmers, but officials estimated that these will only support 58 percent of the required rice seed and 5 percent of the maize seed requirement.

17. Ninh Thuan Province. According to provincial-level officials, rainfall was more than 50 percent below average in 2004, resulting in most of rivers, streams and reservoirs going dry. In 2004, less than 50 percent of available agricultural land was productive for a total area of 10,066 hectares consisting of 4,653 hectares of rice, 1,248 hectares of maize, cotton 69 hectares, with vegetable and beans at 1,794 hectares. Many farm animals have died and malnourishment affects 50 percent of cattle, 30 percent of goats and sheep. Throughout the province, 70-80 percent of new forestation has been lost and 215 hectares of forest burned. The total loss for agriculture to April 2005 is VND136.7 billion (USD 8.6 million) with VND 90 billion (USD 5.7 million) in crop loss, VND 45 billion (USD 2.8 million) for livestock, and forestry loss of VND 787 million (USD 50,000). Only three of ten lakes total in the province have water with Tan Giang at 500,000 cubic meters compared to 13 million cubic meters normally, Song Trau Lake with 3 million cubic meters compared to 31 million cubic meters, and Da Duong Lake with 28 million cubic meters. Out of 59 communes in the province, 32 provinces are short of drinking water and it is estimated that by the end of May 2005, there will be 28,041 households with 152,042 people lacking drinking water.

18. In response to the drought in Ninh Thuan, GVN has provided 5,350 new shallow wells, two deep wells, and many household water storage tanks. Streams and ponds are being dredged, a new reservoir is being built, and new sources of ground water are being investigated. Planting of drought resistant crops and trees is being encouraged and rice, maize, green bean, and grape seed is being provided to farmers. A total of 55,000 animals have been transported to better pasture within and outside the province and veterinary services are being provided. Food distribution consisting of 4,000 tons of rice valued at VND 24 billion (USD 1.5 million) have been provided.

19. COMMENT: While central-level GVN officials indicate that Binh Thuan and Ninh Thuan provinces are the most severely drought stricken areas, Post believes that there may be under-reporting for the Central Highlands region where travel and NGO access are highly controlled. Embassy will seek clearance for an additional drought assessment mission

by OFDA to the Central Highlands and may make additional requests for OFDA assistance based on that assessment.

TEAM OBSERVATIONS

10. Agriculture/Livelihood. Binh Thuan and Ninh Thuan are among the poorer provinces in Vietnam and have a number of minority populations representing various ethnic groups. While the beaches of these provinces offer the prospect of a thriving tourist industry, that potential is yet to be realized and almost the entire population is involved in or dependant on agriculture. As a result, drought impacts the entire provincial economy as purchasing power is lost and farmers go into a debt cycle that will be hard to break even if the rains come this year. As water becomes scarce and the economic assets of families dwindle away, children are often taken out of school to find jobs to contribute to the family income or help with scavenging for food in the forest or fetching water from more and more remote sources. Jobs become harder to find as demand for agricultural labor shrinks as less land is planted. A labor intensive infrastructure program (preferably targeting water retention) employing local labor is one potential GNV response. However, provincial authorities held out little hope that such programs would be prioritized at the central level of GVN where budgetary allocations are made.

11. Most farmers own livestock. Personal consumption is restricted to small livestock such as chickens and ducks while large livestock represents accumulated wealth and the main coping mechanism for hard times, and is therefore not consumed. Unfortunately, in a drought situation, when a farmer needs to sell his animals, either for need of capital or because he can no longer feed or water the animal, the bottom falls out of the market due to the surplus of farmers are in the same position. Farmers reported that the price for cattle was down significantly (about 30-40 percent) and continuing to drop. At the same time, inadequate local production of rice and increased demand from farmers who no longer produce enough for their own consumption have driven up the cost of rice by 20 percent to 30 percent over the last year according to people interviewed.

12. While animals are suffering from lack of fodder, farmers are reluctant to turn their paddy fields to forage crops such as grass, fearing damage to fields and difficulty of converting fields back to normal production if and when the drought breaks. The team did not visit any forest areas but there are widespread reports that in addition to the damage inflicted on the forest by the lack of rainfall, poverty and the need for supplemental food are leading to severe exploitation and damage to vital forest resources.

13. The drought is pushing more and more people below the poverty line. All GVN officials interviewed mention this and one cited a district where the number of people below Vietnam's relatively low poverty line went from 19 percent to 49 percent since the drought began.

WATER, SANITATION AND HEALTH

14. NGO and GVN officials report that as water sources such as streams, shallow wells, springs, rivers, and reservoirs that people depend on for drinking water and sanitation continue to diminish, the incidence of disease is increasing as people are less able to bath or are forced to use contaminated water for bathing and drinking. The increase in disease is both exacerbated by and contributes to the already diminished levels of nutrition due to lack of variety and quantity of available food. Malnourishment leads to susceptibility to disease and gastrointestinal disorders lessen the ability to absorb nutrients. There is currently little data available from the GVN on the nutritional problem related to the drought, although UNICEF and the National Institute of Nutrition of Vietnam have undertaken separate assessments of the problem. Since there is little or no baseline data of afflicted communities, particularly ethnic minority villages, it is difficult to compare acute malnutrition rates caused by the current drought and chronic malnutrition rates.

GOVERNMENT AND INTERNATIONAL RESPONSE

15. The GVN at both central and provincial levels has provided emergency assistance to communities in the drought affected regions. In addition to providing three emergency rice distributions (in February, April, and May 2005), the GVN has provided seeds to farmers, trucked in water with tankers, developed alternative drinking water sources, deepened wells, and transported cattle to better foraging areas in other provinces. Still, local officials admit that the GVN alone is not able to meet increasing needs. Provincial officials of Binh Thuan and Ninh Thuan are willing and able to partner with international NGOs capable of providing assistance.

¶16. COMMENT: Though these are arid provinces, provincial officials admitted that local disaster management plans are focused on flood and storm disasters with few standard operating procedures for dealing with drought. At the national level, a preoccupation with the potential Avian Influenza epidemic may account for the fact that this drought has not received more attention from the Central Government.

¶17. In early April, OXFAM GB, World Vision and UNICEF completed a drought assessment in Ninh Thuan province on behalf of the GVN/NGO disaster management working group (full report may be obtained through the USAID/Vietnam office). The study highlighted widespread loss of livelihoods, increased food insecurity, increases in water-borne diseases, increased childhood malnutrition, and increased drop-out rates in schools as children are required to shoulder more support to their families as livelihoods diminish. The findings of the NGO Team were corroborated by observations of the USAID Assessment Team. Based on this assessment NGOs are enhancing current drought proofing programs, distributing seven million packages of nutritionally fortified noodle soups, and developing new strategies to assist the GVN.

RECOMMENDATIONS

¶18. Immediate. OFDA should support water harvesting and water thrift programs in the South Central Coastal provinces of Vietnam and should focus on provision of drinking water. Such schemes would include, for instance, rooftop rainwater harvesting systems, and deepening and remediation of wells. Initiatives should address both the acute and chronic drinking water shortages in these areas. To the greatest extent possible, programs should use locally purchased materials and local labor under a cash-for-work scheme. This would provide a much needed injection of cash into the economy, allow beneficiaries capital to address their own list of priority needs, and benefit a larger recipient community as cash circulates and multiplies in the local economy.

¶19. Some provision of seeds to farmers may be needed for farmers if the monsoon rains develop sufficiently to support crops. Vietnam is a net exporter of rice and, hence, should be able to meet emergency food needs. Food interventions are therefore not recommended at this point.

¶20. Long-term. OFDA and the USAID Mission should assess the feasibility of providing technical and/or program assistance to the arid zones of Vietnam for the introduction of drought resistant crops, drip irrigation systems, or other applicable drought proofing initiatives.

NOTE: SVC FOR MISSING SIGNATURE
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